

Poverty and Family Structure

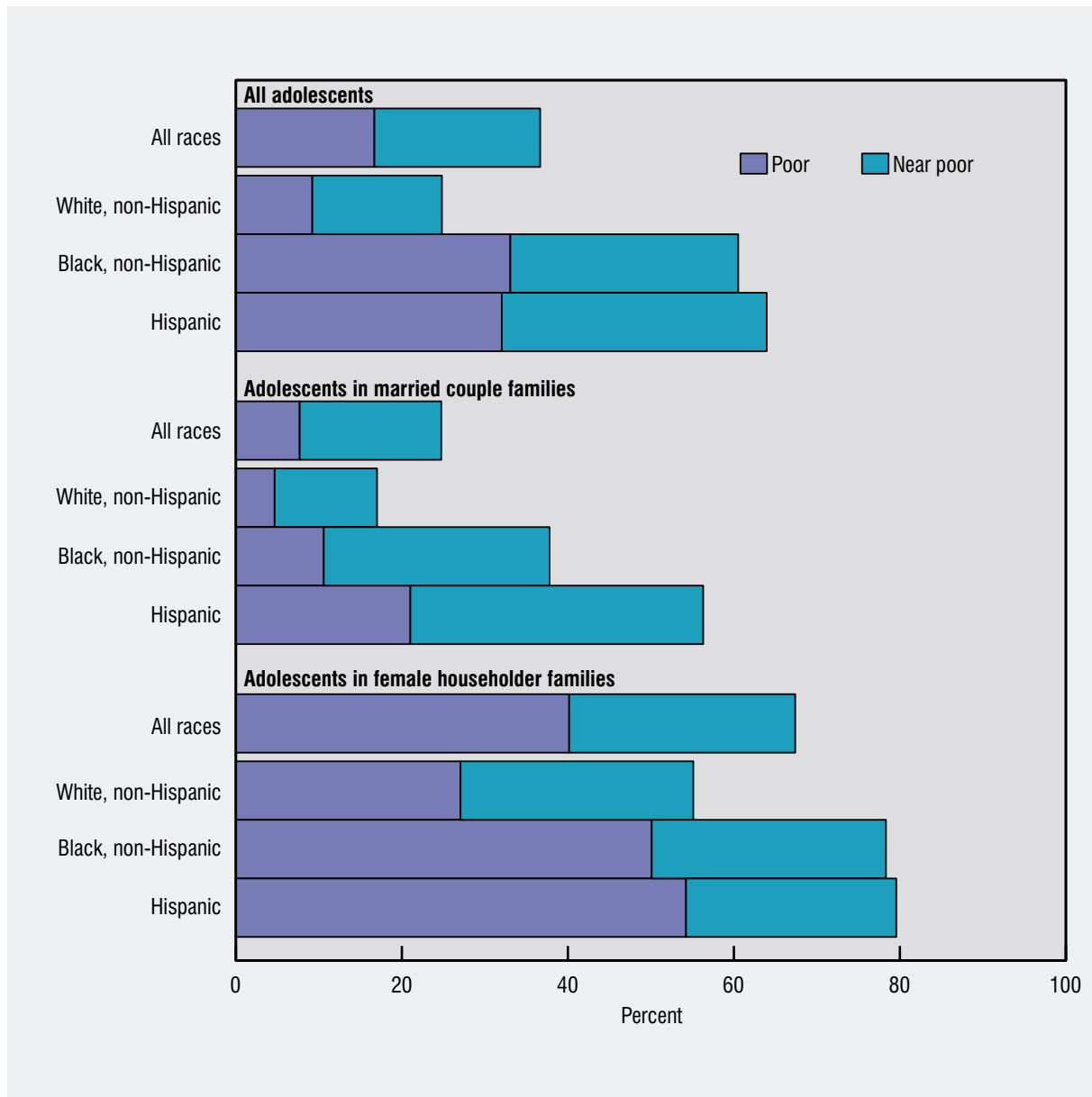
Poverty during adolescence has immediate and lasting negative consequences. Adolescents who are poor are more likely than adolescents in other families to drop out of school (1), to become teen parents (2), and to earn less and be unemployed more frequently as adults (3). Furthermore, poverty is strongly associated with poorer access to health care and poorer health status of adolescents. The structure of an adolescent's family is generally linked to the economic resources and support available to that adolescent.

- In 1998, 17 percent of all adolescents lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold (\$16,660 a year for a family of four), while an additional 20 percent of adolescents lived in families near poverty (one to two times the poverty threshold).
- Adolescents who live in a household with one parent are substantially more likely to have family incomes near or below the poverty line than adolescents living in a household with two parents.
- One-parent households headed by women experience the highest rates of poverty for a variety of reasons, including pay inequities for women and lack of paternal financial support. In 1998, 40 percent of all adolescents in female head-of-household families were living in poverty, compared with 8 percent of adolescents in two-parent families. Non-Hispanic black and Hispanic adolescents in female head-of-household families were twice as likely to have family incomes below the poverty line as their non-Hispanic white counterparts.
- In 1998, 24 percent of non-Hispanic white adolescents lived with a single parent (mother or father), compared with 59 percent of non-Hispanic black adolescents and 37 percent of adolescents of Hispanic origin.
- In contrast to many measures of adolescent health, no age differences were observed in family structure and poverty for adolescents.

References

1. National Center for Education Statistics. The condition of education. 1998.
2. An C, Haveman R, Wolfe B. Teen out-of-wedlock births and welfare receipt: The role of childhood events and economic circumstances. *Review of Economics and Statistics* 75(2):195-208. 1993.
3. Duncan G, Brooks-Gunn J, eds. *Consequences of growing up poor*. New York: Russell Sage Press. 1997.

Figure 2. Poverty by family structure, race, and Hispanic origin among adolescents 10–17 years of age: United States, 1998



NOTES: Poverty status is derived from the ratio of the family's income to the Federal poverty threshold, given family size. Poor is less than 100 percent of the poverty threshold; near poor is between 100 and 199 percent of the poverty threshold. See Technical Notes for further discussion of poverty threshold. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March Supplement 1999.